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TITLE: Structuring Sex Environments Via Public Policy, Does It Make a Difference?

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Public policy varies by jurisdiction in its attempt to reduce risk of HIV transmission in sex clubs and bathhouses (clubs). Policy attempts to control the behavior of customers by restricting the kinds of environments permitted. Some jurisdictions allow only "open spaces" where men have sex (e.g., the County of San Francisco, California), others permit only "closed spaces" (e.g., the State of New York), and still others permit, or tolerate, both types of spaces in their clubs (e.g., the City of Chicago). The actual impact of these policies on sexual behaviors related to HIV transmission has not been assessed.

METHOD: Data are from 3 of 4 cities in the Urban Men's Health Study (n=2881; PI: Catania), a telephone survey of a probability sample of men who have sex with men in San Francisco (SF), New York (NY), Chicago (CH) and Los Angeles (not included in the analysis because clubs of all types exist in LA).

RESULTS: There was no significant difference in the mean number of one-night stands (in the last year) across the three cities (SF:19.7; NY:21.8; CH:16.7). The only significant difference was between SF and NY on the proportion who reported engaging in unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) in a public setting (shaded; $p < .002$).

Proportions of bathhouse and sex club patrons who engaged in UAI and group sex.*

City	(N=610)	UAI (any place)	UAI (in a public setting)	Group Sex
San Francisco	(n=196)	49.0	8.7	67.0
New York	(n=351)	52.4	18.5	61.9
Chicago	(n=63)	54.0	14.3	58.7

* The sex reported did not necessarily take place in a bathhouse or sex club.

CONCLUSIONS: Men in SF were less likely to have had UAI in a "public setting" than men in NY, though neither city was significantly different than Chicago, where all clubs have both types of sex space. Further, SF men were not less likely to have had any UAI. Also, though NY does not allow sex in open areas, men there were no less likely to have group sex, and they did not have fewer numbers of partners. This population level data is suggestive and may be too distant to accurately reflect the true impact of regulated environments on individual behavior. Nevertheless, it suggests a need for a systematic investigation of these clubs and their patrons (and the club/patron interaction), to identify public policies that work to reduce risky behaviors.

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